DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 138 PS 025 371

TITLE	Communicating with Parents. Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community.
INSTITUTION	RMC Research Corp., Hampton, N.H.
SPONS AGENCY	Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (DHHS), Washington, DC. Head Start Bureau.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-16-042687-1
PUB DATE	[95]
NOTE	102p.; For other guides in this series, see ED 348 160, ED 398 220-222, and PS 025 367-376.
CONTRACT	105-93-1585
AVAILABLE FROM	U.S. Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, Mail Stop: SSOP, Washington, DC 20402-9328.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Communication Skills; *Interpersonal Communication; Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; *Parent Teacher Cooperation; Parents; Preschool Education; Resource Materials; Staff Development; Training Methods; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS	*Communication Strategies; Communication Styles; Communications Behavior; *Project Head Start

ABSTRACT

This training guide is intended to assist Head Start staff in meeting their communication goals and enhancing their relationships with parents. Each of the guide's modules details module outcomes, key concepts, and background information. Module 1 addresses communication in the Head Start community and is designed to help participants focus on keys to effective communication such as using a positive approach, making sure to speak and write in a way that is clear and understandable, and appealing to the needs and interests of the listener. Module 2 addresses speaking and listening effectively, and builds on the first module by emphasizing another key to effective communication: respect. Module 3 addresses using plain-language writing and teaches participants to review the factors that can make a piece of writing difficult for a reader, and critique written materials for readability. Module 4 addresses planning the communication process, by enabling participants to take a look at their program's communication efforts and to reflect upon effective staff-parent communication, one-on-one communication, and what can be done to strengthen communication. Contains eight resources. (SD)

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HEAD START

Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community

ED 407 138

Communicating with Parents

PS 025371

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Head Start Bureau

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ISBN 0-16-042687-1

HEAD START®

Communicating with Parents

Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Head Start Bureau

This national training guide was developed by RMC Corporation, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, under contract #105-93-1585 of the Head Start Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services.

Contents

Preface ix

Introduction 1

Overview 1

Purpose/Goals
Audience
Performance Standards

Definition of Icons 5

At a Glance 6

Module 1 9

Communicating in the Head Start Community 9

Outcomes
Key Concepts
Background Information
Activity 1-1: Affirming Communication 10
Activity 1-2: Communication Stories 13
Activity 1-3: Making Messages Meaningful 14
Activity 1-4: Giving Attention 16
Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice 18

Overhead 1: Staff/Parent Communication in Head Start 19

Handout 1: Communication Stories 20

Handout 2: What Attracts Your Attention? 21

Module 2 23

Speaking and Listening Respectfully 23

Outcomes

Key Concepts

Background Information

Activity 2-1: Successful Conversations with Parents 24

Activity 2-2: Communication Helpers 27

Activity 2-3: Listening Well 28

Activity 2-4: Giving Feedback 31

Activity 2-5: Using "I" Messages 32

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice 33

Handout 3: Elements of Successful Communication 35

Handout 4: Communication Helpers and Blockers 38

Handout 5: Listening Well Cue Cards 41

Handout 6: Feedback 42

Handout 7: Giving Feedback 43

Handout 8: Using "I" Messages 44

Module 3 47

Using Plain Language Writing 47

Outcomes

Key Concepts

Background Information

Activity 3-1: Looking at Readability 49

Activity 3-2: Analyzing Writing 52

Activity 3-3: Applying A Readability Formula 56

Activity 3-4: Making Simpler Sentences 57

Activity 3-5: Improving Messages 58

Activity 3-6: Auditing Communications Efforts 60

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice 61

Overhead 2: Passage #1 63

Overhead 3: Instructions for Using the FOG Index 64

Handout 9: Sample Reading Passages, Key 65

Handout 10: Plain Language Writing 69

Handout 11: A Rewrite of Passage #4 72

Handout 12: Making Simpler Sentences, Key 73

Handout 13: Audit Worksheet 76

Module 4 77

Planning the Communication Process 77
Outcomes
Key Concepts
Background Information
Activity 4-1: Communication Quilt 78
Activity 4-2: Communication Environment 80
Activity 4-3: My Communications with Parents 82
Activity 4-4: The Communication Climate 83
Activity 4-5: Systems for Sharing 84
Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice 86
Handout 14: Communication Environment 87
Handout 15: Communication Styles 88
Handout 16: Creating A Climate for Communications 90
Handout 17: Systems for Sharing 92

Continuing Professional Development 95

Resources 97

Materials 97
Resource Organization 98

Preface

Sometimes our communications with each other resemble the bumper car ride at a carnival — haphazard, fast-paced and a little chaotic... cars bumping and crashing into each other, some spinning, some jammed up in a corner, some careening wildly off on their own... most of us having a good time but a few of us picking up bruises.

Sometimes our communications work like a graceful dance — well-orchestrated and beautiful... each dancer moving in rhythm... everyone participating with purpose and focused on a common goal.

And sometimes our communications are as brief as a lightning burst — a jolt of electricity that connects two parts and changes each.

There are many metaphors for the many different kinds of interactions that people have with each other. However, all communications are alike in that they tend to have a purpose whether we are aware of it or not.

At Head Start, the purpose of most of our communications with parents is to build partnerships with families. Interactions with parents should therefore support that purpose. However, directing our communications purposefully takes skill. It is an art learned over a lifetime. This guide is designed to help staff who are in day-to-day contact with parents refine their communication skills. It will help staff reflect on the value of authentic, positive communications and provides activities for staff to practice and use in advancing their skills.

In this guide, communication is viewed as a dynamic process — two-way and mutually beneficial. Therefore, the guide focuses on the concrete communication skills of listening and observing as well as speaking and writing. Finally, it takes staff through the process of planning at the personal and program level to ensure that overall communications at Head Start work toward the purpose of furthering successful partnerships with parents. From the perspective of program management, this guide can improve the opportunities for parents and staff to work effectively together on program planning and participation.

Of course communications at Head Start are not limited to staff-parent interactions. Parents interact with each other, staff with each other, and everyone with children. While the focus here is on the partnership-building communications that develop between staff and parents, staff will be able to apply and model their skills in other contexts.

Communicating with Parents is a functional guide. It follows the groundwork established in the foundational guide, *Engaging Parents*. As parents participate in the program, it will be the quality of the ongoing communications that furthers their involvement and makes the most of the staff-parent partnership.

Module 3: Using Plain Language Writing offers participants practical skills for making written communication more successful. Participants will learn how to use a formula to gauge the reading level of a piece of writing. Participants will review the factors that can make a piece of writing difficult to read and, conversely, easier to read. With these factors in mind, participants will critique written materials for "readability" and will practice plain language writing. Finally, participants will obtain feedback from parents on how their program's print materials might be improved to communicate more successfully with them.

Module 4: Planning the Communication Process enables participants to take a "big picture" look at their program's communication efforts. The activities provide participants with opportunities to reflect upon such questions as: How does our environment support effective staff-parent communication? How can we facilitate one-on-one communication between individual staff and parents? Do the communication strategies we use reach all parents? What more can be done on a program level to strengthen staff-parent communication?

Continuing Professional Development lists ideas that supervisors can use to help staff apply new skills and extend their learning.

Resources lists additional sources of information on the topic of this guide.

Organization of the Modules

In order to accommodate the needs of different grantees, each module offers two different delivery strategies: workshop and coaching. Workshops are suitable for groups of 10 or more. Workshops can build strong site-based teams as well as help staff from multiple sites develop a program-wide identity. Coaching permits a smaller group of staff members to work together under the guidance of a coach, who could be a Head Start director, coordinator, or head teacher, or an outside consultant. Coaching provides individual flexibility and allows participants to work on actual issues and challenges in their own program. While activities vary according to the type of delivery strategy, the content and objectives are the same for each approach.

Each module is organized so that workshop leaders and coaches can easily implement the activities. All modules contain the following sections:

- *Outcomes* summarizes the skills participants will learn in the module.
- *Key Concepts* describes the critical issues addressed.
- *Background Information* provides a rationale for the module.

Overview

Purpose

Seek first to understand and then to be understood.[1]

These words of wisdom are at the heart of staff and parent communication in Head Start. Whether working together to meet the developmental needs of children or towards realizing personal and family goals, staff and parents seek to understand and be understood. They seek to form a partnership based on mutual trust and respect.

This guide assists staff in meeting their communication goals and enhancing their relationships with parents. It is based on three central ideas about communication in Head Start programs:

1. Effective communication is the cornerstone of the parent/staff partnership.

2. Whether formal or informal, effective communication is respectful and clear.

3. To communicate well, one must consciously practice the skills involved. Plus, one must plan for it, at both the personal and program levels.

Organization of the Guide

Module 1: Communication in the Head Start Community helps participants focus on such keys to effective communication as using a positive approach, making sure to speak or write in a way that is clear and understandable, and appealing to the needs and interests of the listener. The module also emphasizes to staff that every communication with parents is an opportunity to reinforce the message that they are valued.

Module 2: Speaking and Listening Effectively builds on the first module by emphasizing another key to effective communication: respect. Participants will review the means by which one conveys respect to the other parties in a conversation. They also will practice techniques for moving conversations along successfully.

12

[1] *The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People*, by Stephen R. Covey

- *Activities* provides step-by-step instructions for workshop or coaching sessions.

- *Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice* includes strategies to help participants practice the skills learned in the module.

Handouts and transparencies appear at the end of each module.

Ideally, participants should complete all the workshops or all the coaching activities in each module sequentially. Similarly, the modules should be used sequentially since activities in each delivery strategy build on one another. If possible, allow participants to complete the modules over an extended period of time, perhaps a four- to six-month period. With *Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice* and *Continuing Professional Development*, training could extend into a year-long process.

Audience

Communicating with Parents is a functional guide, which provides staff with the technical skills for ensuring quality communication with parents.

- Managers will use the information in this guide to plan activities that require the joint participation of parents and staff.

- Teachers, parent involvement staff, and family service staff will use the information in this guide to plan a variety of formal and informal parent interactions.

- All staff can use the information in this guide to assist them in communicating their programs' goals and expectations to, and receiving feedback from, parents.

Performance Standards

This guide contains materials which help programs meet the Head Start Program performance standards which require them to:

- Provide effective two-way communication on program services, activities, policies, and resources.

- Create methods for enhancing parents' knowledge and understanding of their children's needs in terms of education, development, nutrition, health, and disabilities.

- Communicate with parents about community resources and other agencies that can better serve the needs of Head Start families.

- Include parents in the design and implementation of the communication process within the Head Start program in order to further their involvement in the program.

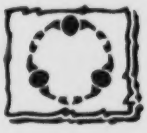
- Work with other community agencies to develop strategies for improving services to Head Start families.

Definition of Icons

Coaching

A training strategy that fosters the development of skills through tailored instruction, demonstrations, practice, and feedback. The activities are written for a coach to work closely with one to three participants.

Workshops



A facilitated group training strategy that fosters the development of skills through activities which build on learning through group interaction. These activities are written for up to 25 participants working in small or large groups with one or two trainers.

Next Steps:
Ideas to Extend Practice

Activities assigned by the trainer immediately following the completion of the module to help participants review key information, practice skills, and examine their progress toward expected outcomes of the module.

Continuing
Professional Development

Follow-up activities for the program to support continued staff development in the regular use of the skills addressed in a particular training guide. It includes:

(1) Opportunities tailored to the participant to continue building on the skills learned in the training.

(2) Ways to identify new skills and knowledge needed to expand and/or complement these skills through opportunities in such areas as in higher education, credentialing, or community educational programs.

Introduction

At A Glance

Module	*Activity*	*Time*	*Materials*
Module 1: Communicating in the Head Start Community	Activity 1-1: Affirming Communication (W)	50-60 minutes	Easel, chart paper, overhead projector, Overhead 1
	Activity 1-2: Communication Stories (C)	30 minutes	Handout 1
	Activity 1-3: Making Messages Meaningful (W)	20-30 minutes	Chart paper, markers
	Activity 1-4: Giving Attention (C)	30 minutes	Handout 2
Module 2: Speaking and Listening Respectfully	Activity 2-1: Successful Conversations with Parents (W)	50-60 minutes	Chart paper, Handout 3, lined paper, pens
	Activity 2-2: Communication Helpers (C)	45 minutes	Handout 4, page 3 of Handout 3 (optional)
	Activity 2-3: Listening Well (W)	30 minutes	Handout 5, Handout 6
	Activity 2-4: Giving Feedback (C)	30 minutes	Handout 6, Handout 7
	Activity 2-5: Using "I" Messages (C)	30 minutes	Handout 8

(W) = Workshop Activity

(C) = Coaching Activity

Module	Activity	Time	Materials
Module 3: Using Plain Language Writing	Activity 3-1: Looking at Readability (W)	60 minutes	Handout 9, Overhead 2, Overhead 3, overhead projector
	Activity 3-2: Analyzing Writing (W)	60-75 minutes	Handout 10, Handout 11, chart paper
	Activity 3-3: Applying A Readability Formula (C)	60 minutes	Handout 9 (page 3)
	Activity 3-4: Making Simpler Sentences (C)	30 minutes	Handout 10, Handout 12
	Activity 3-5: Improving Messages (W)	45 minutes	Writing Sample (selected by facilitator), chart paper, pens, paper
	Activity 3-6: Auditing Communications Efforts (C)	60-75 minutes	Handout 13
Module 4: Planning the Communication Process	Activity 4-1: Communication Quilt (W)	50 minutes	Colored paper, chart paper, markers, tape
	Activity 4-2: Communication Environment (C)	60 minutes	Handout 14
	Activity 4-3: My Communications with Parents (C)	60-75 minutes	Handout 15
	Activity 4-4: The Communication Climate (W)	45 minutes	Handout 16, pens
	Activity 4-5: Systems for Sharing (W)	40 minutes	Handout 17, pens

(W) = Workshop Activities

(C) = Coaching Activities

Communicating in the Head Start Community

Outcomes

As a result of completing this module, participants will be able to:

- Understand the role communication plays in creating and maintaining positive relationships,
- Identify factors that enhance the appeal of messages, and
- Recognize that every communication is an opportunity to reinforce Head Start's mission of valuing parents.

Key Concepts

- Effective interpersonal communication is the key to building staff/parent partnerships. This partnership recognizes and supports the significant role that parents play in the Head Start program and in the lives of their children.
- Effective staff/parent communication is a two-way process, where both staff and parents give and receive information and feel valued.
- People respond positively to communications that are relevant and appealing, and that are expressed clearly. By understanding and employing the factors that contribute to successful communications, staff can increase the effectiveness of their communications with parents.

Background Information

Effective communication is probably the single most important factor that influences the success of the partnership between parents and staff. While much has been written and said about the pivotal role of communication in staff and parent relationships, the one clear constant is that communication requires ongoing practice — practice in listening, observing, reflecting, speaking, and writing.

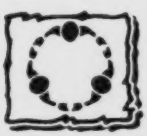
However, before beginning to practice the many and varied discrete skills that go into effective communication, it is important to consider the *value* of communication. The value lies in the experience of understanding and being understood, not in any particular skills used to make a point. Too often in a communication, we focus on the message that we want to get across, forgetting to be open to what the other person is trying to say. A dynamic, two-way communication can take place only when both parties feel valued, accepted, and secure in the knowledge that they will be heard and respected. Therefore, the key to effective communication is to begin by creating a "positive space" for sharing.

Another key to effective communication is to always take the time to consider the individual with whom we are communicating. This is particularly important when communicating with parents at Head Start because they, like everyone else in our modern society, are overwhelmed with demands on their attention. Balancing family, work, school, and personal life often requires parents to juggle activities, do two things at once, rush through tasks, or make choices on what will and won't get done. To cope with all of the competing demands for their time, people naturally tend to select some things to focus on, others to ignore, and still others to do with only half their attention.

What this means for Head Start staff is that they cannot always assume that the message they intend to send is being received — whether it be in a group meeting, in a one-on-one conversation, or through a written message. Staff can, however, increase the likelihood that a parent will focus on a particular communication by presenting information in a way that clearly relates it to the individual parent's needs and interests, is easily understood by that parent, and matches that parent's particular communication style.

A key reason behind the success of the children in Head Start is staff and parents working together. Successful communication between staff and parents is therefore essential. Staff can ensure that kind of success by always opening communication in a positive way and by tailoring their communication to match the individual.

Activity 1-1: Affirming Communication



Purpose: The purpose of this activity is to introduce the role communication plays in creating and maintaining positive relationships.

Trainer Preparation Notes:

For this activity, participants need to be seated next to each other, preferably around tables. It is most important that participants can easily speak with and hear each other.

Materials

Easel, chart paper, overhead projector, Overhead 1

Process

State that in order to explore communication in the program, participants must begin by communicating among themselves.

Let participants know that for the next few minutes you would like them to think about something positive about the person to their right. This may be something that person does that contributes to the program, a personality trait or some other positive characteristic. If any of the participants do not know the person to their right, they may ask that person, "What are three things that you are proud of about yourself?"

After a few minutes, ask for a volunteer to begin sharing thoughts about the person sitting next to him or her. Next proceed to that person, giving him or her an opportunity to react to what was said and then to share his or her thoughts about the person sitting to the right.

Encourage everyone to really hear and pay attention to the positive words that others say about them. Continue the sharing until everyone has had an opportunity to share, including yourself as facilitator of this process. (You may wish to share about the person who first volunteered to begin sharing. What is your impression of the person's willingness to participate?)

After each person has shared, ask participants to respond to the following questions. Record their responses on chart paper:

- **How did this communication make you feel?** Participants may comment that they felt unique, valued, important.
- **What effect did all of these positive statements have on your feeling about the group?** Participants may comment that they felt more openness, a sense of partnership, and an atmosphere of caring.
- **What did you learn about others?** Participants may comment that they gained new information about others, or that they learned to value and appreciate others.
- **What did you learn about communicating?** Participants may comment that they learned the value of beginning a communication with a positive statement or the value of paying attention to what people are doing well (not just what they are *not* doing well).

- **What does this mean for communication with families?** Participants may brainstorm a variety of responses such as:

  - Try to begin conversations with a positive statement.
  - Pay attention to what parents are doing well.
  - Be authentic in your praise, that is, base it on real accomplishments (otherwise it's not respectful).

Debriefing

Show participants Overhead 1, *Staff/Parent Communication in Head Start*. As participants view this overhead, connect its messages to the activity just completed:

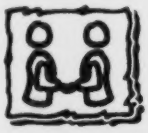
- **Every interaction is an opportunity to build partnerships.** Positive statements can pave the way — they can set people at ease and make them more open to participation and partnership building. In addition, all interactions — whether in one-on-one conversations, group situations, or formal trainings — are opportunities for learning to observe and listen better and thus to improve our communication skills and strengthen our relationships.

- **As staff interact with families, they become better communicators.** Families and staff are partners at Head Start. Positive language, as practiced in this activity, is the language of partnership. Approaching families positively lets them know that they are valued. This increases the likelihood that families will be open and communicative in response. Furthermore, staff can learn to be better communicators by paying attention to the way that others communicate. By observing and listening to the ways that family members communicate effectively with each other and with staff, staff can learn how to tailor our strategies to be most effective with the many individuals they communicate with each day.

- **People are constantly acquiring new communication strategies.** This activity reinforced the message that a positive statement can create more openings for successful communication. From other moments, today, tomorrow, and throughout our lives, staff can learn other effective communication strategies. As you expand your range of communication strategies, you become increasingly better equipped to select the most appropriate strategies to use in any given situation.

Conclude the activity by explaining that the activities that you have selected for them to do from this guide will help them improve their communication skills.

Activity 1-2: Communication Stories



Purpose: The purpose of this activity is to help participants recognize that they also can use positive statements as a way to "open the door" to more effective communication with parents at Head Start.

Materials

Handout 1

Process

Distribute Handout 1, *Communication Stories*. Read together the two examples of positive staff and parent communication. Then direct the participants to write down a similar story from their own experience at Head Start. As an alternative to writing, participants can work in pairs to share their stories with each other. Each participant's story should answer these questions:

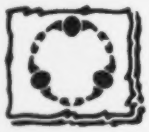
- What did someone say or do that let you know you made a difference?
- How did this communication make you feel?
- How did this communication affect how you saw yourself?
- How did this communication affect your participation in Head Start?

Debriefing

Ask participants to share their communication stories. Talk about how great it was that they had such positive experiences. Emphasize that just as receiving positive communications enabled them to feel valued and move forward with contributions they wanted to make, giving positive feedback enables others to do likewise. Encourage participants to put positive communications into practice by:

- Observing what is positive about others
- Taking the time to send affirming messages
- Responding to positive messages that others send them
- Reflecting on the effects of positive communications

Activity 1-3: Making Messages Meaningful



Purpose: This activity focuses attention on two keys to successful communication: clarity and relevance.

Materials

Chart paper, markers

Process

Tell participants that in this activity they are going to think about what motivates *them* to read or listen to something or someone. What they learn about *themselves* may help them in motivating others, including parents.

Divide participants into small groups of four to six. Hand each small group two pieces of chart paper. Each paper should be divided into two columns, that you have headlined, respectively:

1. Like to Listen to or Read/Why
2. Don't Like to Listen to or Read/Why

> **Trainer Preparation Notes:**
>
> Have sufficient chart paper prepared ahead of time for the number of small groups you will have.

Direct the participants to share with each other their opinions on what they like, and don't like, to listen to or read. Participants should explain why they feel as they do. To ensure that the exercise is understood, ask participants to call out a few examples, such as:

- Like to listen to the radio, because it keeps me company
- Like to read cookbooks, to find good recipes
- Don't like to listen to long lectures, because they're boring
- Don't like to read legal forms, because they are in small print and hard to understand

Have each group assign someone to write down their responses, in large type. Provide about 10 minutes for the small groups to do their work.

Debriefing

When the groups finish their lists, tack the sheets up on the walls where everyone will be able to see. Cluster the "like" papers in one area and the "do not like" papers in another area.

Reconvene the large group. Read aloud, or direct a participant with a loud clear voice, to read aloud the items on each list.

Next, ask the group to think about what they like, and dislike, to listen to or read within the Head Start context, for example:

- Like to listen to children greeting each other in the morning, because it shows they are happy to be here
- Like to read parent newsletter, because it keeps me informed
- Don't like to read paperwork from some social service agencies we deal with, because it takes so long to find the information I need
- Don't like to listen to angry voices, because they make me anxious

As participants call out their opinions, write them on separate sheets of chart paper that you have headlined:

1. Like to Listen to or Read at Head Start/Why
2. Don't Like to Listen to or Read at Head Start/Why

Ask participants to reflect on the patterns behind their preferences. Use this discussion to emphasize that, in general, people do not like to listen to or read, and do not try as hard to listen to or read, communications that:

- Are difficult to understand
- Do not appear to be relevant, interesting, or important to them
- Use difficult vocabulary or a lot of jargon
- Are scholarly, bureaucratic, or condescending in language level and tone
- Are disorganized and hard to follow or are designed in such a way that they are hard to hear or read
- Are unpleasant
- Don't match their learning style

Point out the converse: that listeners and readers will be more receptive to communications that:

- Are quickly and easily understood
- Are relevant, interesting, or important to them
- Use clear vocabulary and no jargon
- Use an appropriate language level and tone
- Are well organized, easy to follow, and designed in such a way that they are easy to hear or read
- Are pleasant
- Match their learning style (i.e., are in print for people who prefer reading, on video or "live" for people who learn by watching, through side-by-side demonstration for people who learn by doing, etc.)

Finally, ask participants to consider the implications for their own work with parents. What can staff do, when they are communicating to parents, to help ensure that those parents will want and try hard to pay attention?

Activity 1-4: Giving Attention

Purpose: This activity will help participants think about the kinds of communications that they themselves find appealing and interesting, in order to discover ideas for making their communications more appealing and interesting to parents.

Materials

Handout 2

Process

Provide participants with a copy of Handout 2, *What Attracts Your Attention?* Tell them that this exercise will ask for their opinions. They will not have to share their answers with anyone, but they do have to be honest in order to get the most from this exercise. Arrange a time to meet (as soon after they have completed the exercise as possible) to discuss it.

Debriefing

Begin by stating that this exercise asked for participants' opinions. Everyone will have different preferences in terms of what they most prefer to focus on during their Head Start workday.

Ask participants:

- What patterns did you discover as you completed the exercise?
- Did you see any connections between your interest in an activity and your willingness to focus on it?
- Did you see any connections between the perceived level of difficulty or discomfort with an activity and your willingness to focus on it?
- What does this imply for communication efforts that you initiate? What characteristics of these communications will be important?

Conclude by emphasizing that, in most instances, people are more attentive — and are more willing to be attentive — in situations where their needs are met, where they are comfortable, where they feel involved, and where they feel they can contribute.

Finally, ask participants to consider the implications for their own work with parents. What improvements would they like to make in the way they communicate to increase the likelihood that parents will want and try hard to pay attention?

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice

- Observe interpersonal communications between parents in a community setting (such as a community organization or support group). What are the similarities and differences between communication among parents in that setting and in the Head Start program?
- Work with a local civic group or cultural organization to find out more about cross-cultural communication practices for families in your community that your program would like to serve better.
- Make a plan to be more aware of your interactions with parents and staff, i.e., are they beginning with positive and affirming statements?
- Identify and observe what catches your attention during everyday communication with other staff members. How can you apply what you learn from these observations so that when *you* communicate with parents, you can be sure to catch *their* attention?
- Review the language used in everyday interactions — is it affirming?

Overhead 1: Staff/Parent Communication in Head Start

- **Every interaction is an opportunity to build partnerships.**

- **As we interact with families, we become better communicators.**

- **People are constantly acquiring new communication strategies.**

Handout 1: Communication Stories

Instructions: In stories #1 and #2, below, two people recall instances when they were told something positive about themselves. Read these stories, then think back on your own experience at Head Start. When did someone praise or compliment you? Why? How did this affect you? Write your own communication story in the space below.

Story #1: When I first began working here I felt young and inexperienced until one day a parent volunteer told me she thought I was older than I actually was. She had formed this opinion because of how hard I worked. This made me feel great because I finally felt I did it, I got a job I like and I'm doing well at it.	***Story #2:*** Two of my colleagues were talking in my office. One said to the other that she never had any hesitation talking with me about any private matter in confidence. She said that they knew it wouldn't go any further than my office. For some reason I had always seen confidentiality as just part of my job. I felt good. It gave me a lot of confidence to realize that I had a reputation for being sensitive to the privacy of my co-workers.

Your Communication Story:

Handout 2: What Attracts Your Attention?

Instructions: First, make a list of all the different objects, people or activities at Head Start that attract your attention during your workday. To help you get started, we've listed a few things.

mail

children's classroom

lunchtime

Now, from your list, pick items that you always look forward to paying attention to. List them below, and explain why each one is attractive. We've provided an example.

Item	Why is this attractive to you?
lunchtime	relaxing, fills need (hunger), learn interesting things from the conversations
1)	
2)	
3)	
4)	
5)	

Speaking and Listening Respectfully

Outcomes

As a result of completing this module, participants will be able to:

- Identify the basic elements of successful communications, and
- Demonstrate conversation techniques that convey respect and build understanding.

Key Concepts

- Conveying respect is at the heart of all successful communications.
- Speaking carefully and listening well are both critical to effective communication.
- Staff can build upon and refine their use of basic communication techniques to make their conversations with parents open and productive.

Background Information

Conversations between and among parents, staff, and children form the heart of communication in the Head Start community. Good conversations help form productive, satisfying relationships.

For conversations to work this way, however, they must convey respect as well as exchange information. In fact, a conversation is sometimes more important for how it creates a climate of mutual respect, than for how it conveys information or meets short-term goals.

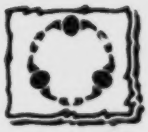
Staff members can become more effective in their communication with parents by being aware of the ways that they show respect for parents in their daily conversations. They also can become more effective communicators by becoming skilled in several conversation techniques that are covered in this module. These are:

- Using communication helpers
- Listening well
- Giving appropriate feedback
- Using "I" messages

Like tools on a toolbelt, these communication techniques are tools that a person can "pick up" and use as appropriate in various conversational settings. As with any tools, using these techniques skillfully takes practice. One must learn to recognize the appropriate moment for using each tool, and one must be able to apply them naturally and sincerely.

For some Head Start staff, the techniques covered in this module may be new concepts. For others who have been through communication skills workshops before, the techniques may be quite familiar. This module, however, gives all participants a chance to refine their use of these communication tools in the particular context of their communications with parents.

Activity 2-1: Successful Conversations with Parents



Purpose: In this activity, participants will have an opportunity to review some of the basic elements of successful communications and to practice applying them in a Head Start setting.

Materials

Chart paper, Handout 3, lined paper, pens

Process

Ask the group to share what they know about the basic elements of successful communications. To provide structure for the brainstorming, distribute Handout 3, *Elements of Successful Communication.* This handout poses four questions:

1. How do we show respect for the other person in a conversation?

2. How do we help keep a conversation open and moving forward?

3. What should we avoid doing so that we don't block the progress of conversation?

4. What cultural or personal factors do we need to take into account when we are having a conversation with someone?

Provide several minutes for participants to reflect on these questions. Then solicit responses for each question in turn. Write participants' responses on chart paper, and encourage participants to take notes on their handout.

Depending on the previous communication skills training of the participants, responses may vary. Several possible responses to each question are listed below. If any of these are not raised in the group brainstorming, raise and discuss them yourself.

■ **How do we show respect for the other person in a conversation?**

1. By giving people time to form thoughts, to respond, and to complete their statements.
2. By focusing on the concern that the other person is expressing.
3. By letting the other person begin the conversation or do a lot of the talking.

■ **How do we help keep a conversation open and moving forward?**

By using:

1. Door Openers ("Would you like to talk about it?" or "You seem upset")
2. Encouragers ("I'd like to hear more about what you think" or "I'm here if you want to talk over your ideas")
3. Open Questions ("What do you hope for in offering to serve on the Policy Council?" or "What are some of your ideas for our classroom?")
4. Nodding, saying "yes" or "no" or "I hear you" or "uh-huh" or "tell me more"
5. Facial and body expressions that show interest

■ **What should we avoid doing so that we don't block the progress of a conversation?**

1. Blaming ("We wouldn't be in this situation if you hadn't....")
2. Saying "always" or "never" ("My son always loses the papers you send home")
3. Name-calling or labeling ("You're such a workaholic")
4. Giving advice or commentary ("If I were in your shoes I would...." or "Something just like that happened to my sister. She....")

5. Lecturing or threatening ("Prompt medical attention is very important" or "This will be your child's last week here unless you provide us with completed immunization forms")

6. Avoiding or belittling another's concern ("It's not really so bad")

7. Facial and body expressions that show lack of interest

■ **What cultural and personal factors do we need to take into account when we are having a conversation with someone?**

1. Each family may have its own ways of communicating. For example, in some families someone other than the parent (an elder, family member or community member) may be the key contact for family issues.

2. Body language varies among cultures. For example, different cultures make different use of eye contact, physical distance between speakers, and unspoken gestures.

3. Consider the physical arrangement between all of the people in your conversation so that everyone shares control. Be aware of how this factor can affect a conversation if, for example, one person is behind a desk, at the head of the table or standing above the other. Also be aware of the seating arrangements for group conversations. Are staff and parents seated separately or together? Would the parties to the conversation feel more comfortable sitting in a circle of chairs rather than in rows?

4. Remember that people have different learning styles. For some people, being told information is not the best way for them to receive information. Hands-on demonstrations, handouts or visuals may work better for them.

5. Everyone has a culture. Being aware of your own cultural lens through which you view the world is as important as trying to understand others.

Direct participants' attention to page 3 of the handout, which presents a dialogue between a Head Start staff member and a parent. Ask for two volunteers to read the dialogue. Then ask participants how the staff member conveyed respect, used communications helpers, and took into account cultural and personal aspects of the parent. Also have them indicate the points in the dialogue where the staff member blocked the conversation. Have participants discuss whether either the parent or the staff member, or both, met their goals for the conversation.

Then divide the group into four teams. Direct each team to create a script between a Head Start staff person and a parent that includes some of the elements of successful communications (conveying respect, communication helpers, and being attentive to culture and person). Teams may also include communication blockers in their script. Give each team several sheets of lined paper and pens, and tell them they have 20 minutes to write their script.

Reconvene the large group. Have two volunteers from each team role-play their script. Then have participants identify the elements of successful communication in the conversation. Also have them identify any communication blockers. For each blocker, ask for suggestions on how it could be turned into a helper.

Debriefing

Ask these questions:

- Are these conversations like other conversations in your program? Why? Why not? Note that although the conversations may be different, the elements that help make them successful are similar.
- What kinds of actions or statements helped the conversations move forward or blocked progress? Note that while we learn from observing successful communication, we often learn just as much by reflecting on those communications that are not successful.

Activity 2-2: Communication Helpers

Purpose: This activity focuses on identifying techniques that help keep a conversation open and productive.

Materials

Handout 4, page 3 of Handout 3 (optional)

Process

Introduce the activity by saying that knowing how to respectfully open up communication is an important skill for everyone in the Head Start community. This skill also can help staff communicate well in their own families and in other personal relationships.

Distribute Handout 4, *Communication Helpers and Blockers*. Read through it with participants.

Then direct the participants to read the sample dialogue. Have them mark the communication helpers with an "H" and the blockers with a "B."

After the communication helpers and blockers have been identified, ask the participants for suggestions on how they would rewrite the story to change the blockers to helpers.

For added practice if there is time, have participants repeat the exercise using the Staff-Parent Conversation that appears on page 3 of Handout 3.

Debriefing

Summarize the session by noting that successful communication is an art that one acquires through practice. The first step is to be familiar with the tools that can help keep a conversation open and productive, and to consciously apply them. Successful communicators also learn to recognize when their statements or behavior could be blocking a conversation, and to replace these negative elements with communication helpers.

In closing, ask the participants to each choose one communication helper that they will try to use as much as possible in the next week.

Activity 2-3: Listening Well

Purpose: This activity introduces the importance of listening well in order to promote effective communication.

Materials

Handout 5, Handout 6

Process

Introduce the activity by telling participants that while they are, no doubt, good listeners, you'd like to share with them some techniques that will help them refine their listening abilities.

Recruit two volunteers for a role play. Give each the appropriate cue card from Handout 5, *Listening Well Cue Cards*. Have the two volunteers stand in front of the group and act out their parts.

Stop the role play after about three minutes and thank the volunteers. Lead a discussion using the following questions:

(To the speaker)

- Did you feel well listened to?

- What let you know that the other person was listening?
- What changed?
- How did that make you feel?

(To the rest of the group)

- What did you observe?
- What are some of the ways that people show interest in what you are saying?

Ask participants to each think about a time when they felt that someone really listened to them. Allow a few minutes of quiet for this reflection. Then ask several participants to share their stories and to explain what it was that made them feel like they were being heard.

Conclude the discussion by saying that there are three essential elements to good listening:

1. You must be open to the conversation — that is, you must be willing, and appear willing, to listen.

2. You must pay attention. Paying attention helps you focus on what is said, and it lets the other person know you are really listening.

3. You must offer feedback. By restating what you hear the other person say, you let the other person know that you are truly listening. Feedback also confirms to that person that you have properly understood. Finally, feedback allows the other person to reflect on what he or she has said.

Introduce the next segment of this activity by telling participants that they are going to have an opportunity to refine their communication skills by mastering three forms of feedback.

Note that many people in the group may be familiar with the basic format of feedback, which is to say something like, "What I hear you saying is...." or "Did I understand you correctly when you said...." Because they are so familiar, however, these lines can sometimes sound artificial and forced. In this activity, participants will be able to practice using feedback in a more tailored and personalized way.

Distribute Handout 6, *Feedback*. Review the descriptions of the three forms of feedback. Note that all three types of feedback may be used in a single conversation. However, they each have a distinct purpose:

- Factual feedback is best used when someone tells you something factual, without much emotion.

- Emotional feedback is best used when someone shows emotion as they tell you something.

- Solution-focused feedback is best used when someone is telling you about a problem and trying to find a solution. Note, however, that it is not your job to find solutions to other people's problems, but rather, to reflect back the speaker's own ideas. Also, solution-focused feedback only works after, or in combination with, plenty of factual and emotional feedback.

Tell participants that the group is going to practice these listening skills by doing some one-line role plays. Say that you will play the role of a parent and make a statement that requires feedback. Ask for a volunteer to join you at the front of the group. As you make each statement, the volunteer should respond using the appropriate form of feedback. Invite other members of the group to add their suggestions for appropriate feedback.

These role plays don't have to go any further than your statement and participants' suggested responses. However, if a conversation develops using effective feedback, keep the role play going.

Here are some possible conversation openers you could use:

(Statement needing factual feedback) My daughter is not acting like herself lately.
(Statement needing emotional feedback) She's driving me crazy.
(Statements needing solution-focused feedback) Maybe she should go live with her grandmother for awhile.

(Statement needing factual feedback) I don't think I passed my GED test.
(Statement needing emotional feedback) The thought of taking that test again makes me sick.
(Statements needing solution-focused feedback) I don't know if I should keep trying or not.

(Statement needing factual feedback) My landlord told me he's going to sell our house.
(Statement needing emotional feedback) I'm so tired of moving!
(Statements needing solution-focused feedback) I want to buy my own place.

Trainer Preparation Notes:

Before the workshop, prepare several sets of statements, tailored to your group, to use for this feedback practice session.

Tell participants that you would like them to use this opportunity to practice conversations from real-life situations. Have participants suggest a parent-staff situation, and ask for two volunteers to stand in front of the group to do the role play. Remind the group of the essential elements of listening: being open to a conversation, paying attention, and offering feedback.

After each role play, ask the group to comment on how each volunteer demonstrated listening skills. Ask for any suggestions on other ways the conversation could have been handled.

Debriefing

Ask for someone in the group to restate the essential elements of listening. Once someone has, ask for someone else to list the three forms of feedback. Thank them, and encourage participants to try out their newly refined listening skills at Head Start and at home.

Activity 2-4: Giving Feedback

Purpose: Participants will learn how feedback techniques can be used to improve conversations with others.

Materials

Handout 6, Handout 7

Process

Tell the participants that in a conversation, it is not enough for each person to do some talking. Each person also has to do some listening. One way to show that you are listening is by offering feedback. By giving feedback, you confirm to the other person that he or she is being heard and understood. It provides a means for the other person to clarify statements if they are not understood correctly. It also enables the other person to reflect on what they have been saying, which can help them move forward in problem-solving.

Distribute and review Handout 6, *Feedback*. Have them practice one-line role plays using the three forms of feedback (you may use the suggested conversation openers from Activity 3, page 30).

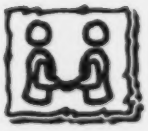
Give out Handout 7, *Giving Feedback*. Tell participants that their assignment is to look for opportunities in the next week to apply feedback skills in a conversation. Discuss with them what some of those opportunities might be (for example, with their children, at a conference with parents, with a supervisor). After they have had a conversation in which they used feedback, they should use the handout to make notes on the techniques that worked.

Debriefing

Ask participants to describe the situation in which they practiced giving feedback and how the feedback affected the conversation. Address any issues they raise concerning the use of feedback.

If participants are willing, reenact their conversations to give them an opportunity to try other types of feedback or to refine the feedback strategies they employed.

Activity 2-5: Using "I" Messages



Purpose: Participants will practice using "I" messages to help move a conversation in a positive and productive direction.

Materials

Handout 8

Process

Start out the activity by stating, "You really don't like working with me, do you?" Wait for the participants' response. Then ask them to describe how they felt when you said that. Explain that if they felt offended or put off, it is because you were using a kind of communication blocker called a "you" message. You were attributing a feeling to them rather than honestly stating your own feelings. "You" messages tend to turn people off because they feel they are being blamed, attacked or pigeonholed.

Next, explain that in contrast to "you" messages there is a kind of communication helper called "I" messages. With "I" messages, the speaker takes responsibility by attaching the expressed opinion to himself or herself. Demonstrate this by showing how you could rephrase your original statement as an "I" message, thus: "When I give you all these hard assignments, I worry that you won't like working with me." Ask participants for their reactions to the statement phrased in that form.

Give participants Handout 8, *Using "I" Messages*. Read through the examples, and have participants work singly or in pairs to convert the "you" messages on the worksheet to "I" messages.

Debriefing

Direct participants to pay attention in the conversations they have in the next week for times when they or others use "I" messages and "you" messages. Ask for them to pay attention to what happens when either kind of statement is used.

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice

- Ask participants what communication skill they want to continue to work on. Have them write notes to themselves stating their own learning goals related to these skills. Provide the participants with stamped envelopes. Have them place their notes in the envelopes, address them to themselves, and give them to you. Mail the notes back to participants, unopened, one month later as a reminder of their own learning goals.
- Discuss with participants how they show respect, open themselves to the conversation, pay attention, and offer feedback in conversations that take place by *telephone*.
- Ask the participants to observe a television or video conversation within the next week, and to note in their journal what opens up communication and what blocks it.
- Arrange for a speaker from a local college to address the group on communication skills.
- Create a work group to review the program's policies relating to communication with parents, and to make any recommendations they think appropriate to the policy council.
- Work with classroom teachers to create a lesson for the children, teaching the basics of "I Messages" in ways that three- and four-year-olds can understand.

Handout 3: Elements of Successful Communications

1. How do we show respect for the other person in a conversation?

2. How do we help keep a conversation open and moving forward?

Handout 3: Elements of Successful Communications (continued)

3. What should we avoid doing so that we don't block the progress of conversation?

4. What cultural or personal factors do we need to take into account when we are having a conversation with someone?

Handout 3: Elements of Successful Communications (continued)

A Staff-Parent Conversation

Setting: The center during drop-off time
Staff member: Miss Pratt, the family service worker
Father: Mr. Bowen, the father of a child at Head Start
Miss Pratt's goal for the conversation: To enroll the father as a volunteer
Mr. Bowen's goal for the conversation: To voice concern about his son's ability to succeed in kindergarten.

Miss Pratt: Good morning, Mr. Bowen! You look so happy this morning.

Mr. Bowen: Oh, hi there, Miss Pratt. I'm just real pleased with how excited Jacob is when I bring him here.

Miss Pratt: He does love it. I know he's looking forward to kindergarten this fall.

Mr. Bowen: Yeah, so am I, pretty much.

Miss Pratt: Pretty much?

Mr. Bowen: To tell the truth, I am a little worried about something.

Miss Pratt: Can I help?

Mr. Bowen: I just don't know what to do to make sure he's ready for kindergarten. I'm not a trained teacher.

Miss Pratt: You know, in the parents' room we have take-home activities for you to do with your son. In fact, I'm looking for some volunteers to help me put together some new activities.

Mr. Bowen: See, one of my nieces is in kindergarten and her mother said she's not doing so well.

Miss Pratt: Oh?

Father: The teacher says she's not mature for her age or something.

Miss Pratt: Mature?

Mr. Bowen: (shaking his head): The teacher seemed to think she's going to have to repeat kindergarten.

Miss Pratt: Well, I stayed back in third grade and it didn't seem to hurt me. I wouldn't worry about it.

Mr. Bowen (looking away): I don't want Jacob to be held back!

Miss Pratt: Do you want me to show you those take-home activities now?

Mr. Bowen: Huh? No, that's okay — see you later, Miss Pratt.

Handout 4: Communication Helpers and Blockers

COMMUNICATION HELPERS

1. Door Openers ("Would you like to talk about it?" or "You seem upset")

2. Encouragers ("I'd like to hear more about what you think" or "I'm here if you want to talk over your ideas")

3. Open Questions ("What do you hope for in offering to serve on the Policy Council?" or "What are some of your ideas for our classroom?")

4. Nodding, saying "yes" or "no" or "I hear you" or "uh-huh" or "tell me more"

5. Facial and body expressions that show interest

COMMUNICATION BLOCKERS

1. Blaming ("We wouldn't be in this situation if you hadn't....")

2. Saying "always" or "never" ("My son always loses the papers you send home")

3. Name-calling or labeling ("You're such a workaholic")

4. Giving advice or commentary ("If I were in your shoes I would...." or "Something just like that happened to my sister. She....")

5. Lecturing or threatening ("Prompt medical attention is very important" or "This will be your child's last week here unless you provide us with completed immunization forms")

6. Avoiding or belittling another's concern ("It's not really so bad")

7. Facial and body expressions that show lack of interest

Handout 4: Communication Helpers and Blockers (continued)

CONVEYING RESPECT

1. Giving people time to form thoughts, respond and complete their statements

2. Focusing on a concern that is expressed

3. Letting the others begin the conversation or do much of the talking

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT CULTURAL AND PERSONAL FACTORS

1. Each family may have its own ways of communicating. For example, in some families someone other than the parent (an elder, family member or community member) may be the key contact for family issues.

2. Body language varies among cultures. For example, different cultures make different use of eye contact, physical distance between speakers, and unspoken gestures.

3. Consider the physical arrangement between all of the people in your conversation so that everyone shares control. Be aware of how this factor can affect a conversation if, for example, one person is behind a desk, at the head of the table or standing above the other. Also be aware of the seating arrangements for group conversations. Are staff and parents seated separately or together? Would the parties to the conversation feel more comfortable sitting in a circle of chairs rather than in rows?

4. Remember that people have different learning styles. For some people, being told information is not the best way for them to receive information. Hands-on demonstrations, handouts or visuals may work better for them.

5. Everyone has a culture. Being aware of the cultural lens through which you view the world is as important as trying to understand the culture of others.

Handout 4: Communication Helpers and Blockers (continued)

Find the Communication Helpers and Blockers

During a routine vision screening, Mary Goins, the Head Start health worker, discovered that four-year-old David may have an eye problem. She called David's mother, Rita Caras, with a referral to an eye doctor. Rita promised to make an appointment soon. She began putting money aside each week for the doctor's bill. She planned to call an eye doctor as soon as she had enough money saved up. She asked her neighbor and her sister if they knew of a good eye doctor, and wrote down the names they each gave her.

Two months have gone by. Mary noticed Rita when she came with David for Open House at the Head Start center. The following conversation took place:

Mary: Hi, I'm Mary, the Head Start Health Worker. Are you David's mother?

Rita: Yes, I'm Rita Caras.

Mary: I'm so glad to finally meet you in person! Would you like me to call you Rita or Ms. Caras?

Rita: Everybody calls me Rita.

Mary: How are you and David doing, Rita?

Rita: Fine. I was so glad I came tonight. This is the first time I've seen the Center.

Mary: Really? What are your impressions of this place?

Rita: There's just so much for David to do here.

Mary: To do here?

Rita: He's such an active boy. I have trouble keeping him entertained at home.

Mary: It's hard to keep him busy?

Rita: Lord, yes. I wish I had all the books and things the teachers have here.

Mary: It sounds like you need more things for David to play with at home. Did you know you can check out books and toys?

Rita: Really?

Mary: You can take some home with you tonight. I'll show you how to do it right now, if you like. Come this way.

Rita (following Mary): That would be wonderful! Oh, by the way, I plan to call an eye doctor next week!

Mary (turns and stops): Next week! Oh dear! I'm surprised you haven't made an appointment yet.

Rita: I'm getting to it! It's not such a big deal!

Mary: But it is a big deal, Rita. David's eyesight is too important to neglect!

Rita: You don't understand...

Mary: I do understand this: if you can't get him to an eye doctor right away, I will have to take steps myself.

Handout 5: Listening Well Cue Cards

Note for the Facilitator: Make only one copy. Cut apart before workshop and give each cue card to a volunteer for the role play.

Listener

For the first two minutes, do everything you can to convey that you are listening well. For example:

- Use body language that shows you are open to the speaker.
- Be attentive.
- Provide verbal and nonverbal feedback.

After the first two minutes, stop paying attention. For example:

- Cross your arms.
- Tap your foot.
- Look away.
- Yawn.
- Look at your watch.
- Interrupt the speaker with a story about something similar that happened to you.

Speaker

Talk to the listener for three minutes about something happening at Head Start that you really care about (but not something confidential).

Handout 6: Feedback

How to Give Appropriate Feedback

1. Restate what you hear

2. Respond in a way that matches the other's statement

The Three Types of Feedback

1. *Factual:* A direct restatement of what happened.

> EXAMPLE: "Your daughter cries when you drop her off at Head Start. This is the first time you've left her with anyone outside your family."

2. *Emotional:* A statement reflecting how the speaker seems to feel about it.

> EXAMPLE: "It breaks your heart to hear her crying when you leave."

3. *Solution-focused:* A statement summarizing the speaker's ideas about what to do about it.

> EXAMPLE: "You think maybe it would help if you volunteered in the classroom, but starting next week you'll go to your job training class each morning. You're wondering if it is okay to volunteer this week even if you can't continue? Yes, we'd be happy to have you here, and I think it would help your daughter feel at home. You could stay today? Great!"

Handout 7: Giving Feedback

Situation:

How I gave feedback:

What worked:

The effect it had on the conversation:

Items I want to talk about with my coach:

Handout 8: Using "I" Messages

Introduction

When _____ (describe what happened),

I feel _____ (describe your feeling).

I want _____ (describe what you would like to happen).

Example of an "I" Message: "When my son tells me other kids are picking on him, I feel worried about his safety and happiness here. I want to meet with you to discuss ways to keep him safe.

Example of a "You" Message (what not to say): You're letting the other kids pick on my son.

Example of a "You" Message Disguised as an "I" Message" (what not to say): I feel that you're letting the other kids pick on my son.

Responses to "I" Messages: If the other person responds positively to your statement on what you would like to happen, say, "Thank you." If the other person resists your "I" Message through blame, attack, or excuses, try not to let it sidetrack you. Use reflective listening and feedback, and then give your "I" Message again. You may need to use several rounds of listening, feedback, and "I" Messages.

Instructions: The following statements are being made by a staff person to a parent. Turn these "you" messages into "I" messages. Some of these statements are "you" messages disguised as "I" messages.

1. You must be having problems with Antonio adjusting to the new baby. He's putting up such a fuss when you leave him here.

2. You didn't enjoy the Open House, did you? You left so quickly.

3. You didn't bother to show up for our conference yesterday.

Handout 8: Using "I" Messages (continued)

4. Don't you care that your son is missing breakfast?

5. I think you don't like the way I'm teaching.

6. I wonder why you've been avoiding me because you haven't returned my phone calls.

7. You must feel awful about not getting that job.

8. You're not reading stories to your daughter like you said you would.

9. You forgot to fill out the permission slip again, and now Julie didn't get to go on the field trip.

10. You didn't remember to bring cupcakes for the twins' birthday.

Using Plain Language Writing

Outcomes

As a result of completing this module, participants will be able to:

- Apply a readability formula to a writing sample in order to predict whether it will be understood by its intended readers,
- Identify the factors that can make a piece of writing difficult to read or, conversely, easy to read,
- Critique written materials for "readability," and
- Use a variety of editing strategies to improve the clarity of written materials they produce for parents.

Key Concepts

- "Plain language" writing is a strategy of expressing information in a straightforward, simple manner so as to reduce the time and skills demanded of the reader.
- Staff can ensure that written materials are accessible to the broadest possible range of parents by using a plain language approach in their print communications.

Background Information

Any time writers put pen to paper, they have choices in the way they express themselves. For example, they can choose to include a great deal of information, just the basic facts, or some amount in between. They can choose to use academic language, jargon, or everyday speech. They can choose to use a conversational tone or to speak "officially." What is important is that the writer expresses himself or herself in a way that best matches the intended readers.

"Plain language" writing means making choices in the way you write in order to communicate information quickly and efficiently. It is a very useful way to communicate critical, important information to a diversity of people.

Head Start programs have very important things to say to parents. At the same time, Head Start parents vary a great deal in terms of interests, available time, education, and skills. For these reasons, a plain language approach is often the best strategy for staff to use when communicating in print.

Here are some of the advantages of plain language writing:

- It reduces the reading burden on parents and staff who have limited amounts of time.
- It makes program information easier for everyone to understand.
- It makes print materials more accessible to parents who have reading skills below the high school level.
- Likewise, it makes print materials easier to read for parents whose native language is not English.

Parents are more likely to read and use printed information that is in plain language. They also are more likely to respond as requested. When reports and other internal communications are in plain language, staff can more easily share useful information with each other, too.

Another benefit of having print materials for parents in plain language is that they are much easier to translate into other languages.

It often happens that a staff member finds something in print that he or she would like to share with parents, but the text is at a high reading level. Staff that are familiar with plain language techniques can use them to "translate" these kinds of materials into easier-to-read versions.

Plain language writing requires that you consider the following:

Context: Does the reader have the background knowledge to understand what is being said?

Concreteness/Abstractness: Is the language clear and familiar to the readers? Are examples relevant? Can people really picture in their minds what is being said?

Clarity of Style: Are main ideas stated up front, with other information following in logical order?

Design: Is the material easy on the eyes, in fairly large type, with some white space?

Readability: Are the materials written at a level that matches the reading skill of the intended audience?

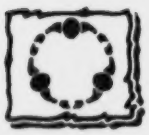
A good "rule of thumb" is to have written materials at a 6th-8th grade reading level. That makes them accessible to a broad range of people, yet not so simplified that content is sacrificed.

There are a few things that "plain language" writing does not mean. It does *not* mean throwing grammar out the window. In fact, sloppy grammar and poor sentence construction can get in the way of clear communication.

Plain language writing does *not* mean communicating less information. Rather, it requires that you state your message in clear, uncluttered language, and that you get rid of redundant or unneeded text, so that all the real information gets across.

Finally, plain language writing does *not* mean avoiding every long or difficult word. Sometimes there are important words you want to use that aren't themselves easy to read. With plain language writing, readers are more able to focus on and comprehend these more difficult words, because the document as a whole is so simple and direct.

Activity 3-1: Looking at Readability



Purpose: Participants will learn how to use a "readability" formula to check whether a given piece of writing will be easy to read for the parents who are the intended readers.

Materials

Handout 9, Overhead 2, Overhead 3, overhead projector.

Process

Introduce the activity by explaining that the FOG index is a tool you can use to get a general sense of the reading ease or difficulty of a text. Continue by stating that the reason that Robert Gunning called this formula FOG is because it can help to take the "fog" out of writing, that is, to make written materials more clear and concise.

Introduce the FOG index using the information below.

What readability formulas do:

Readability formulas provide a rough estimate of the reading level of written material. They can be a useful tool for predicting whether a given piece of writing will be accessible to, or present difficulties for, intended readers.

The value of this readability formula:

The FOG index can be used to get a general sense of how hard or easy something is to read. It also can be used to compare two drafts of the same manuscript.

This formula can be used on texts that are at least 100 words or more. It is based on the following assumptions:

- Longer words are harder to read than shorter words.
- The shortest way of saying something is the easiest to read.

While these assumptions are not always true, they can be useful as a guide when writing in plain language.

How this readability formula works:

The FOG index assigns a fixed numerical score that indicates a "reading level" for the text. It measures the reading level of a text in terms of:

- The number of words per sentence; and
- The number of long words (words with three or more syllables).

Readability formulas provide a general sense of readability. They should be used as a guide but not as an absolute indicator of reading level.

Distribute Handout 9, *Sample Reading Passages*. Explain to the participants that these samples have been taken from program descriptions given to parents at actual Head Start centers.

Trainer Preparation Notes:

This exercise will be easier to do if you provide a calculator for each group.

Ask participants to look over the four passages and think about which one they prefer to read and why. After five minutes, ask them to give you feedback to these questions:

- Which passage do you prefer to read?
- Why do you prefer that passage? (i.e., it was clear, personal, easier to read...).

Explain that one of the reasons more people prefer Passages #1 and #2 is that they are easier to read than Passages #3 and #4

Instruct participants to turn to page 3 of their handout, *Instructions for Using the Fog Index*. As you review the instructions, model the use of the readability formula by applying it to Passage #1. Use an overhead projector and Overheads 2 and 3 to do so.

Next, divide the participants into two groups.

Direct one group to work together to apply the Fog Index to Passage #2. The other group should apply the Fog Index to Passage #3.

Debriefing

Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Passage #1. Restate the reading level of that passage.

Ask a second volunteer to read aloud Passage #2. Ask the group that worked on this passage for its readability level.

Finally, ask a third volunteer to read aloud Passage #3. Ask the group that worked on this passage for its readability level.

Ask participants whether they find any relationship between how each passage sounded as it was read aloud and the reading level it was measured at.

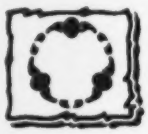
Ask participants to restate the key variables measured by the FOG readability index (sentence length and word length).

If time permits, and the group is willing, apply the FOG index to Passage #4. This passage is taken through a complete rewrite Activity 3-5.

Trainer Preparation Notes:

Some participants may say that they already have too much paperwork to do and won't ever have time to use a readability formula. Let them know that by comparing the four reading passages in this exercise, they have had a chance to "see" what different reading levels look like. They also have learned some of the variables (sentence and word length) that can make materials more difficult to read. Even if they never use a readability formula again, participants have gained experience that can help them create plain language materials in the future.

Activity 3-2: Analyzing Writing



Purpose: Participants will review the factors that can make a piece of writing difficult to read or, conversely, easy to read.

Materials

Handout 10, Handout 11, chart paper

Process

Distribute Handout 10, *Plain Language Writing*. Discuss each item briefly and answer any questions as to meaning.

> **Trainer Preparation Notes:**
>
> Be prepared with examples from actual materials used in your Head Start program to support each point on the handout.

Ask for a volunteer to reread aloud Passage #1. Using Handout 10 as a guide, have participants suggest some of the factors that give this passage a low reading level. The answers may include:

- Short sentences
- Use of bullets to break up information
- Directly addresses the reader ("you")
- Friendly conversational style
- Simple vocabulary

Ask for a new volunteer to reread aloud Passage #4.

Note that according to one readability formula (the FOG index), Passage #1 is at a 3rd grade reading level and passage #4 is at a 22nd grade reading level.

Tell participants that since many, if not most, Head Start parents do not have post-graduate degrees, their goal for this activity will be to revise Passage #4 into plain language.

Instruct participants to analyze this passage, sentence by sentence. Do this by having a volunteer read aloud the first sentence. Then ask for comments on what makes that sentence relatively hard to understand and how that sentence could be restated more clearly. Write suggestions on chart paper. Repeat this process for the other three sentences.

Trainer Preparation Notes:

Participants will make a variety of suggestions, some modifying other suggestions. Write all of the suggestions on the chart paper. This shows that making meaning clear can take a lot of drafting and rewriting. It also demonstrates that there is no "one way" to say something.

To help facilitate this exercise, the four sentences from Passage #4 are analyzed, with some suggested rewording, below.

Sentence 1
The overall goal of the Head Start program is to bring about a greater degree of social competence in children.

What makes the sentence hard for a reader to understand:

- Reader may not know what is meant by the term "social competence."

How the sentence could be restated more clearly:

The main goal of Head Start is to help children learn and grow through their experiences with other people — with family members, friends, schoolmates, teachers, and everyone else in their lives. This ability to have successful relationships with other people is called "social competence."

This suggested rewording shows that sometimes the use of more words can make things clear, by defining terms that may be unfamiliar.

Sentence 2
Social competence takes into account the inter-relatedness of cognitive and intellectual development, physical and mental health, nutritional needs, and other factors that enable a developmental approach to helping children achieve social competence.

What makes the sentence hard for a reader to understand:

- Very long sentence (32 words)
- Jargon ("inter-relatedness," "enable a developmental approach")
- Redundancy ("cognitive and intellectual")
- Heavy reliance on general terms ("physical", "mental", "nutritional", "developmental")
- Circular sentence (begins and ends with "social competence")

How the sentence could be restated more clearly:

For children to develop social competence, they must have learning opportunities, healthy bodies and minds, and good nutrition.

Note that it is difficult to reword the last part of the sentence ("factors that enable a developmental approach....") without knowing more about what the writer was attempting to say. This is important. When material is written at a very high level, it can hide the fact that the meaning is actually unclear.

Sentence 3
To the accomplishment of this goal, Head Start objectives and performance standards provide for the improvement of the child's health and physical abilities, including appropriate steps to correct present physical and mental problems and to enhance every child's access to an adequate diet.

What makes the sentence hard for a reader to understand:

- Very long sentence (43 words)
- Wordy
- Too much information in one sentence

How the sentence could be restated more clearly:

Therefore, Head Start is committed to:

- **Helping children improve their health**
- **Helping children develop their bodies**
- **Helping children overcome any existing health problems**

- **Making sure that every child has a good diet**

Note that by rewording the sentence, it becomes apparent that the writer has left out the fact, inferred by the previous sentence's definition of social competence, that Head Start is also committed to "helping children learn."

Also note that in the suggested rewrite, we have left out reference to "objectives and performance standards." Some participants may feel those particulars are too important to compress into "Head Start is committed to." That's a valid opinion — have them suggest their own restatement.

Sentence 4
The performance standards also provide for the improvement of the family's attitude toward future health care and physical abilities.

What makes the sentence hard for a reader to understand:

- Not clear what is meant by "future...physical abilities"
- Wordy
- Do they really mean "attitude"?

How the sentence could be restated more clearly:

Head Start is also committed to helping parents build on the skills and knowledge they can use to ensure the healthy development of their children.

Debriefing

Distribute Handout 11, *A Rewrite of Passage #4*. Have a volunteer read it aloud. Ask for comments on the two versions of Passage #4.

Trainer Preparation Notes:

This may be a good opportunity to discuss the concern that making things "too easy" to read will offend fluent readers. How do the participants respond to the two versions? Do they find either one condescending, unfriendly, too complex, or overly simplistic? Chances are that the more difficult passage is more off-putting to people than the easy-to-read passage. Good readers may enjoy the complex and literary language of scholarly works and fiction. But when it comes to need-to-know information, good readers are like everyone else: they want it straight and simple.

Activity 3-3: Applying a Readability Formula

Purpose: This activity is designed to help participants evaluate whether a print sample is written at a level that will successfully communicate information to the intended readers.

> **Coach Preparation Notes:**
>
> This coaching activity should be used with staff who have reading skills at or above the high school level and who are comfortable with basic math computations such as division and averaging.

Materials

Handout 9 (page 3)

Head Start writing sample (selected by facilitator)

Process

Use the information on pages 49-50 to review the values and limitations of readability formulas.

Note that Head Start staff need to ensure that written materials they supply to parents match the reading abilities of those parents. To reach the broadest possible range of parents, staff may want to aim for a 6th-8th grade reading level.

Distribute page 3 of Handout 9, *Instructions for Using the FOG Index*. Using a sample from the Head Start program that you have collected yourself, walk participants through the steps of applying a readability formula.

Direct participants to collect a sample of writing that their Head Start program uses with parents. This sample should contain narrative writing of 500 words or more. Instruct them to apply the readability formula to at least two, and preferably three, different 100-word sections.

> **Coach Preparation Notes:**
>
> Encourage participants to do this exercise in pairs so that they can check each other's math work. Also, see that participants have access to a calculator and know how to use it to compute averages and do division.

Debriefing

Have participants describe the subject matter of each writing sample, its intended audience, and the reading level according to the FOG index.

Ask participants:

- Was there any relationship between how the passage sounded as it was read and its reading level?
- Do the writing samples appear to be written at an appropriate level for parents?
- What impact on communication may occur if writing samples that measure at a high reading level are distributed to parents?

Activity 3-4: Making Simpler Sentences

Purpose: This exercise helps participants build a "plain language" vocabulary that they can draw from as needed in communications with parents.

Materials

Handout 10, Handout 12

Process

Distribute to participants Handout 12, *Making Simpler Sentences*.

Explain that this exercise will help participants become conscious of the vocabulary choices they have when speaking or writing. Choosing the "plain language" way to express oneself is often the best means of ensuring that the broadest spectrum of parents will be able to receive the message accurately.

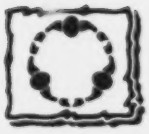
Walk participants through the first few substitutions on the list. Then direct them to complete the exercise by themselves. If they get stuck, they can ask co-workers or family to help them.

Debriefing

Review the answers that participants came up with for the exercise. Note that each sentence has several possible "plain language" solutions.

Give participants a copy of Handout 10, *Plain Language Writing*, and review together. Encourage participants to think about words or phrases commonly used in their Head Start program that could benefit from a "plain language" translation (for example, frequently used jargon or academic language). Have them add these words, and plain language substitutions, on the back of the handout. Encourage participants to keep this list handy as a reference tool.

Activity 3-5: Improving Messages



Purpose: Participants will use plain language writing strategies to revise a writing sample and explore ways to have parents review the material for readability.

Materials

Writing sample (selected by facilitator), chart paper, pens, paper.

Process

To prepare for this activity, you will need to select a writing sample to analyze. You should select a sample used at Head Start such as a program description, parent manual, or brochure. This sample should be on a topic or from a source that is relevant to parents in Head Start. It also should be at least 100 words long.

Trainer Preparation Notes:

To select an appropriate writing sample, ask parents who are active in the program, or former parents who are now on staff, what kinds of information they feel needs to be made more accessible.

Ask participants to think about specific ways that their program might benefit from a plain language communications approach. Have them describe the advantages for both staff and parents. Write their ideas on chart paper.

Next, divide participants into small groups of three to five. Give each participant a copy of the material you have pre-selected. Ask for a volunteer from each group to read the sample aloud to his or her group. Then direct each group to analyze the sample in terms of the following questions:

- What are the important messages?
- Would many Head Start parents be interested in this information? Why? How can the material be adapted to their particular interests?
- How could this information be restated in "plain language" so that the broadest range of parents could understand it?

Put these questions on separate pieces of chart paper at the front of the room, as a guide for the small groups.

Have participants spend at least 10 to 15 minutes on the third question, developing specific ideas for restating the message.

Debriefing

Reform the group at large. Repeating each question above, have volunteers summarize their respective group's findings. Using revisions suggested by the participants, write up a plain language version of the sample on chart paper.

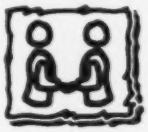
Emphasize that in order to tailor their communications to parents in their program, staff need:

- To know their parents — their interests and concerns, background knowledge, and reading and language abilities.
- To consult with others as test readers in the drafting, revising, and rewriting process.

Solicit suggestions for involving more parents in the planning of written and spoken communications. Ideas may include:

- Invite parents to attend idea meetings on program materials and presentations.
- Have parents and staff co-author or co-edit print materials.
- Form a team of parents and staff to review print materials from outside sources.

Activity 3-6: Auditing Communications Efforts



Purpose: Participants will use an audit form to determine whether various print materials used in their programs match the interests and reading skills of parents served. They will use the information collected by the audit to consider improvements that can be made to their program's print communications.

Materials

Handout 13

Process

Give participants Handout 13, *Audit Worksheet*. Instruct participants to locate three or more print samples that are used in the Head Start program. These samples should (1) have at least 100 words in them and (2) be used with parents.

Some ideas for print samples are: policy manuals, parent handbooks, orientation materials, parent newsletters, and information on child and family development. Direct participants to read and analyze each sample according to the questions on the *Audit Worksheet*. They will need a copy of the handout for each sample they will be analyzing.

Debriefing

Ask participants to report the findings from their audit. Ask them:

- Based on your audit, is the program tailoring its print materials to the interests and reading skills of the parents?
- What improvements could be made?
- How could parents be involved in making those improvements?

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice

- Interview parents to gain their perspective on the accessibility of the program's print information to parents as a whole and to different groups of parents.
- Select one or more print materials used by the program to revise for readability. Work with parents to ensure that the material successfully communicates.
- Form a staff/parents committee to review and recommend program-wide revisions to materials.
- Tape a meeting with parents. Analyze the tape to determine whether the staff communicated using a language level and tone appropriate to the parents in the program.
- Network with literacy professionals, such as staff at the local library or community literacy programs, to obtain resources and assistance in revising program materials to better communicate to parents with limited literacy skills.

Overhead 2: Passage #1

Parents! You are always welcome in the Head Start classroom. At home you are the primary teacher of your children. At Head Start, you have a lot to contribute, too. What can you do in the classroom? You can:

- Tell a story
- Read a story
- Teach a lesson
- Teach a song or dance
- Prepare a snack
- Create teaching materials
- Work with children at their play and learning
- Help on a field trip
- Help with playground duty
- Welcome other parents

We have parent meetings that help decide the goals for the classroom. We have a newsletter that parents write. We have workshops that can help you understand how your children grow and learn. We even have classes for parents who want to improve their reading and writing skills. We want you to be involved. We need you to be involved!

Overhead 3: Instructions for Using the FOG Index

Passage 1

1. Count off a 100-word sample.

2. Count the number of complete sentences in the sample. _____

3. Count the total number of words in the complete sentences. _____

4. Find the average sentence length (#3 ÷ #2). _____

5. Count the number of words of three or more syllables in the entire 100-word passage. _____

6. Add the answers to #4 (average number of words per sentence) and #5 (long words). _____

7. Multiply your answer to #6 by the constant .4 (4/10) to get your approximate grade-in-school reading level. _____

Handout 9: Sample Reading Passages

Note: The four passages here are adapted from materials used in the field by actual Head Start programs.

PASSAGE #1

Parents! You are always welcome in the Head Start classroom. At home you are the primary teacher of your children. At Head Start, you have a lot to contribute, too. What can you do in the classroom? You can:

- Tell a story
- Read a story
- Teach a lesson
- Teach a song or dance
- Prepare a snack
- Create teaching materials
- Work with children at their play and learning
- Help on a field trip
- Help with playground duty
- Welcome other parents

We have parent meetings that help decide the goals for the classroom. We have a newsletter that parents write. We have workshops that can help you understand how your children grow and learn. We even have classes for parents who want to improve their reading and writing skills. We want you to be involved. We need you to be involved!

PASSAGE #2

Volunteers are a vital part of our Head Start program. We can use men and women of many ages — retired people, college and high school students, anybody with extra time. Here are some of the specific things that you can do as a volunteer working with Head Start teachers:

- You can take small groups of children on outings.
- You can supervise outdoor play.
- You can take part in indoor creative play such as blocks, dress-up or table games.
- You can take part in music activities.
- You can tell or read stories.
- You can talk with the children about everything they do in a way that will help them learn, understand and use more words.
- You can drive or escort a child or a small group of children to medical appointments.

Handout 9: Sample Reading Passages (continued)

PASSAGE #3

The Head Start Program is based on the premise that all children share certain needs and can benefit from a comprehensive developmental program to meet those needs. The Head Start program approach is based on the following philosophies:

- A child can benefit most from a comprehensive, interdisciplinary program to foster development and remedy problems as expressed in a broad range of services.

- The child's entire family, as well as the community, must be involved. The program should maximize the strengths and unique experiences of each child. The family, which is perceived as the principal influence on the child's development, must be a direct participant in the program. Local communities are allowed latitude in developing creative program designs so long as the basic goals, objectives and standards of a comprehensive program are adhered to.

PASSAGE #4

The overall goal of the Head Start program is to bring about a greater degree of social competence in children. Social competence takes into account the inter-relatedness of cognitive and intellectual development, physical and mental health, nutritional needs, and other factors that enable a developmental approach to helping children achieve social competence. To the accomplishment of this goal, Head Start objectives and performance standards provide for the improvement of the child's health and physical abilities, including appropriate steps to correct present physical and mental problems and to enhance every child's access to an adequate diet. The performance standards also provide for the improvement of the family's attitude toward future health care and physical abilities.

Handout 9: Sample Reading Passages (continued)

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THE FOG INDEX CREATED BY ROBERT GUNNING

1. Count off a 100-word sample.	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	Sample 4
2. Count the number of complete sentences in the sample.				
3. Count the total number of words in the complete sentences.				
4. Find the average sentence length (#3 ÷ #2).				
5. Count the number of words of three or more syllables in the entire 100-word passage.				
6. Add the answers to #4 (average number of words per sentence) and #5 (long words).				
7. Multiply your answer to #6 by the constant .4 (4/10) to get your approximate grade-in-school reading level.				

NOTES

- For longer materials (more than one page), this process should be repeated every few pages to obtain an average readability across the whole text.
- Count numbers and symbols as words.
- Count each part of a hyphenated word as a word (for example, "merry-go-round" is three words).
- Count the syllables that you hear (for example, "advised" is two words and "advising" is three).
- Count the part of a sentence after a colon (:), semicolon (;) or dash (—) as a new sentence.

Handout 9: Sample Reading Passages (Key)

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THE FOG INDEX CREATED BY ROBERT GUNNING

Note: Do not distribute this key to workshop participants. It is for trainers only. Readability measures are not exact. Allow for some interpretations about where the sentence ends or the number of syllables in a word. The readability level will still only vary by one grade level or less.

1. Count off a 100-word sample.	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	Sample 4
2. Count the number of complete sentences in the sample.	18	7	5	3
3. Count the total number of words in the complete sentences.	90	80	84	96
4. Find the average sentence length (#3 ÷ #2).	5	11.4	16.8	32
5. Count the number of words of three or more syllables in the entire 100-word passage.	3	8	16	23
6. Add the answers to #4 (average number of words per sentence) and #5 (long words).	8	19.4	32.8	55
7. Multiply your answer to #6 by the constant .4 (4/10) to get your approximate grade-in-school reading level.	3.2	7.8	13.2	22

Handout 10: Plain Language Writing

CONTEXT

- Know your readers — key your presentation to their needs, interests, and knowledge level.
- Address the readers as your peers. Your readers are your adult peers but not necessarily your professional peers, so use your everyday adult talking voice, not your "professional" voice.
- Use a "hook" to pull in your audience. Give readers a reason to be interested and stay interested.

LANGUAGE AND USAGE

- Talk to the audience. Address the reader as "you." Avoid the third person (he, she, or they).

  EXAMPLE: Instead of "Parents do a lot to help their children learn" write, "As a parent, you do a lot to help your children learn." This makes the material more personal and direct.

- Use the active voice, not the passive voice.

  EXAMPLE: Instead of "Parents are reminded to attend the Friday meeting" write, "Parents, please remember to attend the Friday meeting."

- Be concrete. Pick words that create pictures in the mind.

  EXAMPLE: Instead of "An infant's vocalizations eventually become spoken language" write, "The babbling sounds a baby makes will someday turn into words and sentences."

- Avoid jargon, bureaucratese, and specialized vocabulary.
- Define words in context using relevant examples or metaphors.
- Keep your sentences fairly short (no more than 20 words). Limit each sentence to one important idea.
- Wherever possible, use the primary language of your audience.

Handout 10: Plain Language Writing (continued)

ORGANIZATION

- Present information in a logical 1, 2, 3 order.
- Break information into digestible "chunks." Use paragraphs, subheads, and bullets to break up information.

  EXAMPLE: During the Head Start day, your child will:
  - Take part in teacher-led learning activities
  - Enjoy free play
  - Have a snack and a warm meal

- Limit the amount of new information per presentation (per handout, chapter, or discussion).
- Give a phone number or the name of a contact person. Make this information prominent. This lets people know where to direct their questions if they don't understand all the information.
- Define words in context or in a glossary if you must use unfamiliar or hard-to-read words. If you use a glossary, put it up front, so readers know it's there, and call it "Words You Need to Know."

DESIGN

- Use a type size that is easy on the eyes (12 or 14 points). The type on this handout is 12 point.
- Use wide margins and white space. This gives the reader "breathing room" to see the words.
- Avoid clutter. Too much on a page will overwhelm the reader.
- Use illustrations and pictures where possible. Artwork can add interest or clarify the message. Make sure any art you use is appropriate to the culture and experience of your audience.
- Provide clean copies. Poorly printed materials make it hard for the readers and give the idea that you don't care if they read it.

Handout 10: Plain Language Writing (continued)

SIMPLER WORDS AND PHRASES

Instead of this:	*Use this:*
accomplish	do
accurate	correct, right
adjourn	end, close
adversely affect	harm, hurt
ameliorate	improve, fix
a minimum of once	at least one time
approximately	about
ascertain	find out, learn
be in the position to	can
collaborate with	work together with
commence	begin, start
compel	force
component	section, part
conduct	run, hold
consult	ask, check with, talk to, meet with
critical	important
currently	now
derive benefits from	gain
designate	choose, name
disseminate	send out, give out, pass out, hand out
enable	allow
establish	set up, prove, show
evaluate	check, rate, test
examine	check, look at
facilitate	help
factor	reason, cause
feasible	can be done, workable
function	act, work, role OR party, event
henceforth	from now on
implement	put into place
individualize	tailor to each person
initiate	start
in reference to	about
input	opinion
in the near future	soon
in view of the fact	because
it is requested that	please
justify	prove, explain
limitations	limits
locality	place, town
magnitude	size
majority	most, greatest
maximize	build on, allow to grow
modify	change
necessitate	force, cause
numerous	many, a lot
observe	see
on a monthly basis	monthly
operate	run, work
optimum	best, greatest, most
participate	take part, come
perceive	see
permit	let
pertaining to	about, of, on
possess	have, own
premise	belief
primary	main
prior approval	agree ahead of time
prioritize	rank
regulation	rule
rescind	take back
responsive to needs	meet needs
scenario	story
solicit	ask for
terminate	end, fire
viable	workable
with reference to	about

On the back, continue this list with words and phrases you use in your work.

Handout 11: A Rewrite of Passage #4

The main goal of Head Start is to help children learn and grow through their experiences with other people — with family members, friends, schoolmates, teachers, and everyone else in their lives. This ability to have successful relationships with other people is called "social competence." For children to develop social competence, they must have learning opportunities, healthy bodies and minds, and good nutrition. Therefore, Head Start is committed to:

- Helping children improve their health
- Helping children develop their bodies
- Helping children overcome any existing health problems
- Making sure that every child has a good diet

Head Start is also committed to helping parents build on the skills and knowledge they can use to ensure the healthy development of their children.

Handout 12: Making Simpler Sentences

Instructions: Make the following sentences easier to read. On this page, a part of each sentence has been rewritten for you. The next page contains whole paragraphs that you will need to rewrite.

1. Parents must register their children prior to the start of the Head Start program year.

Parents, you must _____

2. Staff violation of this policy may result in disciplinary action resulting in suspension or termination of employment.

Staff members, if you _____

3. The orientation evening is for parents and teachers to get acquainted.

Parents, you can _____

4. There has been a modification to the curricular schedule.

We have _____

5. This Head Start program is based on an effective staff development model.

We believe in _____

6. Elements of Head Start's curriculum for pre-school age children includes guided learning, social development opportunities, narrative activities, outdoor physical exercise, expressive play, and nutritional opportunities.

Head Start's program for children age 5 and under includes:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____ **, and**
- _____

Handout 12: Making Simpler Sentences (continued)

7. It is requested that you attend our orientation function which commences at 8 p.m. tonight on these premises. At this meeting, staff will explain Center procedures, disseminate critical materials, and solicit parent input on a variety of matters concerning curricula.

8. This is in reference to your child's excessive tardiness. Children derive optimum benefit from our program when they have full exposure to the curriculum. Henceforth, please endeavor to deliver your child to class in a timely manner. Should you require assistance, contact our Family Worker. She will be glad to collaborate with you to resolve the situation.

9. Disciplining children, based as it must be on the use of parental power, never influences; it only compels children to behave in prescribed ways for the present moment, usually leaving the child unpersuaded, unconvinced, and unmotivated. A more effective parenting process entices children into the desired behavior patterns.

10. Handicapped children are eligible to enroll in our Head Start program. Our services for special needs children involve recruitment, evaluation (including screening, assessment, and diagnosis), implementation of the Individual Education Plan process and facilitation of the child's transition to public school.

Handout 12: Making Simpler Sentences (key)

NOTE — **Do not distribute this key to workshop participants.** It is for the trainer only. Handing out this key to workshop participants may give them the false impression that there is only one correct way to rewrite the sentences. The rewrites below are provided as examples only, as an aid to the trainer.

1. **Parents, you must** sign up your children before the Head Start program begins.

2. **Staff members, if you** break this rule, you may be suspended or fired.

3. **Parents, you can** meet your child's teacher at Welcome Night.

4. **We have** made changes to the education plan.

5. **We believe in** on-going staff training and support.

6. **Head Start's program for children age 5 and under includes:**
   - teacher-led learning activities
   - group games and projects
   - story time
   - outdoor playground time
   - free play, and
   - healthy snacks.

7. Please attend our orientation program, which starts at 8 p.m. tonight here at the Center. At this meeting, we will explain how the Center is run, hand out important materials, and ask for your ideas on several things having to do with the education plan.

8. I am writing you about your child coming late so often. Children gain the most from our program when they attend the whole class. From now on, please try to get your child to class on time. If you need help, contact our Family Worker. She will be glad to work with you to solve any problem.

9. When you force children to behave, it doesn't necessarily change how they will behave again in the future. You can be more successful if you find positive ways to encourage your child to behave the way you want.

10. We welcome children with special needs to our program. To help such children succeed at Head Start, we:
   - actively recruit children with special needs
   - conduct a full evaluation of each child
   - create a special education plan for each child (similar to the "IEP" used in public schools for special needs children)
   - help each child successfully make the move into the public schools

Handout 13: Audit Worksheet

1. What is the topic of this print sample?

2. What does a parent need to know already to understand what is in here?

3. What would make parents want to read this?
   Is the reason clearly stated? yes — no —
   Is the reason up front? yes — no —
   Does the tone encourage parents to read this? yes — no —
   Does the design encourage parents to read this? yes — no —

4. Put stars next to the three most important facts that the reader needs to know.
   Are these facts located in logical order? yes — no —
   Are these facts up front? yes — no —

5. Put a line through any parts of the message that you think are not important and could be left out. Explain why.

6. Draw an arrow to the section that asks for a response, if any.
   Is the request clearly stated? yes — no —
   Is it clearly stated how parents should respond? yes — no —

7. Circle all words of more than 3 syllables.

8. Circle all words that are "jargon."

9. List 1-3 changes you would make to this document if it were to be redone.

Planning the Communication Process

Outcomes

As a result of completing this module, participants will be able to:

- Analyze their program's structures for communicating with parents.
- Assess one's preferred communication style and identify strategies for communicating successfully with those who may or may not share that preference, and
- Create a plan for improving communication processes that build on program strengths.

Key Concepts

- Effective communication with parents is a two-way process that is positive and appealing.
- Effective communication with parents requires that staff listen, speak, and write in a way that is respectful of person and culture.
- Effective communication requires conscious planning at both a personal and program level.
- Both the climate and the structure of a Head Start program are key to effective communication with parents.

Background Information

Communication is something that can take place without conscious thought or planning. *Effective* communication, however, requires both. In the Head Start setting, staff and parents are constantly interacting with each other. Whether or not these interactions help to build partnerships depends on the degree to which the parties to the communication apply the listening, observation, speaking, and writing skills that communicate respect and create a positive space for sharing.

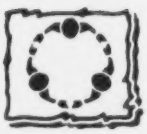
There are two ways that programs can support effective communication between staff and parents. The first is by developing a climate for effective communication, and the second is by creating the structures that support information sharing.

"Climate" refers to the accepted ways of working and behaving that affect how communications are carried out. This can include such elements as the pace of the workday, the casualness or formality of the workplace, or the number of opportunities each day that staff and parents have for coming into contact with each other.

"Structures" include such things as bulletin boards, newsletters, calendars, phone trees, or logs — consistent and thoughtful methods of sharing basic information that enable both staff and parents to have access and give input.

Since family involvement is so crucial to all Head Start programs, it is to be expected that all programs will have some sort of climate and some structures in place that support staff-parent communication. However, all programs can benefit from occasional examination to determine whether any modifications or improvements to the overall communication environment can be made.

Activity 4-1: Communication Quilt



Purpose: Participants will analyze their program's overall communication patterns by creating a visual representation in the form of a quilt.

Materials

Four-inch squares of construction paper in three colors (enough for at least 2-4 squares in each color per participant), chart paper, markers, tape. If you will be doing the optional extension to the workshop, you will need squares in three additional colors.

Process

Previous activities have examined how individuals interact or communicate with each other. This activity focuses on communication patterns at a program level. These questions will be considered: What are the types of messages that are conveyed within this Head Start program? Who are the intended receivers of these messages? What are the different ways that messages are sent?

Explain to participants that in this activity, they will have an opportunity to create a visual representation of their communication practices in the form of a communication quilt. This is a way of taking an inventory of current practices in order to identify what is working and what areas might need improvement or change.

Distribute the colored squares to participants. Give them instructions for each color of square, as follows:

1. For the first color: Write words or draw pictures that depict the messages that Head Start would like to send to every parent. For example: parents are their child's first teacher; Head Start supports the family's own agenda.

2. For the second color: Write words or draw pictures that depict characteristics of the parents who are the intended receivers of Head Start messages. For example: teen parents, fathers, working parents with little time, or families whose primary language is Spanish.

3. For the third color: Write words or draw pictures that depict the strategies used to convey messages. For example: body language, newsletters, home visits, modeling.

To demonstrate the instructions, you may wish to prepare a few quilt pieces in front of the group, using words or pictures that participants suggest. Allow 5 - 10 minutes for participants to complete this task. Participants may wish to work alone or in small groups.

Place several pieces of chart paper together on the wall. Have participants tape the quilt blocks in random order on the chart paper. When the quilt blocks have been taped up, suggest that participants take a few minutes to review the quilt and the ideas represented on the different squares of colored paper.

Debriefing

Once participants have had an opportunity to review the finished quilt, lead them in a discussion using the following questions:

- What impressions do you have about the type of messages that the program conveys?
- What impressions do you have about the range of characteristics that parents have?
- What impressions do you have about the range of strategies used to convey messages?

If through this discussion participants think of other messages, parent characteristics or communication strategies, write them on appropriately colored quilt blocks and add those squares to the quilt.

Optional Extension

Hold up in front of the group the squares you have prepared in three additional colors. Note that these squares represent additional elements to Head Start communication that make it a two-way process:

- Messages parents send to staff (Color #4)
- Staff characteristics (Color #5)
- Strategies parents use to convey messages (Color #6)

Tape the blank squares, in alternating colors, around the border of the communication quilt. Have participants suggest words or pictures that describe "messages parents send to staff" and write their suggestions on the appropriately colored squares. Fill in the other squares in the same manner for "staff characteristics" and "strategies parents use to convey messages."

Ask these questions:

- How are some of the messages that parents send to staff similar to or different from the messages staff send to parents?
- How are staff characteristics similar to or different from parents?
- How are the strategies that parents use to communicate to staff the same as or different from the ones staff use to communicate to parents?

If Activity 4-1 is being followed by Activity 4-4, leave the quilt on the wall so participants can refer to it.

Activity 4-2: Communication Environment

Purpose: Participants will complete an observation task in order to reflect on how their program's physical environment supports communication with parents.

Materials

Handout 14

Process

Ask participants to name the different parts of their program environment (i.e., the outside of the building, the entry way, the playground, etc.). Distribute Handout 14, *Communication Environment*, and ask participants to decide on two different parts of the environment that they would like to observe.

Talk briefly about how things in our environment communicate messages. For example, by placing magazines, books, and flyers in the entry area we may communicate that we have important information to share or that we value reading. Families sitting, laughing, and talking outside may communicate that this is a place to gather and feel at home.

Emphasize that the examples given are interpretations. In reality the messages from our environment will mean different things to different people. For example, a family may not choose to read or get information from the materials in the entry way. They may value having a lively discussion as a way of exchanging information and getting to know more about the program.

Explain that the task for the participants in this activity will be to interview a parent to find out how he or she interprets the Head Start environment.

Remind the participants that as staff persons, they already are aware of the information that the program wants noticed. Their goal in this activity is to find out how messages are being received by parents.

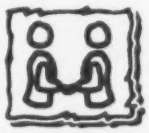
Have participants follow the instructions on the Handout for interviewing parents.

Debriefing

Ask participants the following questions:

- Which messages stood out to the parents you interviewed? Why do you think they picked up on that message so clearly?
- Are there messages in our program that are important that weren't being clearly understood by the parents?

Activity 4-3: My Communications wtih Parents



Purpose: Participants will examine how they prefer to receive and give out information. They will use this information to reflect on how communication can best proceed between two people who may or may not share a preferred communication style.

Materials

Handout 15

Process

Assign participants into pairs. Give each participant a copy of Handout 15, *Communication Styles*. Direct the participants to complete page 1 by themselves. They should then work with their partners on page 2, which guides them in interpreting their responses and also presents discussion questions.

Debriefing

Begin by asking participants what the exercise taught them about their preferred communication style. Did it confirm something they already knew?

Some participants may say that the results were not conclusive (for example, if they circled items from two or more quadrants). It could be that they are equally comfortable with more than one style of communication. It also could be that this brief exercise simply doesn't work for them. Ask these participants if they have a sense of their preferred communication style despite having no "answer" from this activity.

In your discussion, cover the following points:

- Reading, writing, listening, and speaking are four of the different ways we communicate. None is "better" than the other. They are all useful, and they are all used by nearly everyone. Which style is most appropriate for a given situation depends on the preferences of the people involved and the circumstances.

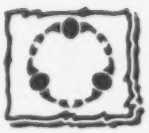
- A person's preference for communicating is simply that — a preference. It is not tied to intelligence or ability. Some people may believe (or may have been taught in school) that communicating by speaking and listening is not as "smart" as communicating by writing and reading. That is not true. Intelligence is in the content of a message, not in the particular style that is used to communicate it.

- At Head Start, all four modes of communication are used. Staff need to be sensitive to the fact that just as they have communication preferences, so do individual parents. Staff can make their communications with parents more effective by being aware of both their own and others' preferences.

Finally, ask participants to consider the following scenarios:

- What if someone whose preferred style is writing needs to communicate with someone whose preferred style is listening?
- What if someone whose preferred style is speaking needs to communicate with someone whose preferred style is reading?

Activity 4-4: The Communication Climate



Purpose: Participants will work in teams to analyze how their program's overall environment supports strong staff-parent communication.

Materials

Handout 16, pens

Process

Begin by stating that Head Start staff and parents exchange a lot of information in a variety of ways — in brief chats and long conversations, in face-to-face meetings and over the telephone, in group meetings and in one-on-one conferences, to name a few. The program environment can contribute to the effectiveness of these exchanges. This activity looks at ways the program supports this ongoing process.

Break participants into groups of three. Give each group a copy of Handout 16, *Creating a Climate for Communication*. Have each group complete the handout together.

Debriefing

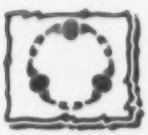
When all of the small groups have completed the handout, reconvene the large group. Ask one of the small groups to describe the idea it explored for promoting effective communication, as well as the options they brainstormed. Then encourage the other participants to contribute feedback.

Repeat this process for each of the small groups.

Trainer Preparation Notes:

Encourage participants to reflect on their list of ways that programs already are promoting effective communication (from Part 1 of this exercise). Some of these successes may be useful examples to share with other programs exploring similar strategies.

Activity 4-5: Systems for Sharing



Purpose: Participants will look at their program's formal structures for information sharing to determine how effectively they are reaching all parents.

Materials

Handout 17, pens

Process

Divide participants into groups of 5-8.

Trainer Preparation Notes:

If possible, include parents in this activity. Also, if participants come from different centers, group participants together by center.

Begin the workshop by stating that all Head Start programs have information-sharing systems in place. These systems may include logs, phone trees, calendars, bulletin boards, newsletters, or other ways that communications are centrally conveyed. These systems ensure that basic information is shared in a consistent and thoughtful way that enables both staff and parents to have access and give input.

The goal behind these systems is to ensure that all critical information reaches all affected parents and staff. But do they do this consistently? That is what will be examined in this activity.

Give each participant Handout 17, *Systems for Sharing*. Walk through the questions on page 1 of this handout so that the groups are comfortable with the process for filling out the form.

Direct each group to work together to complete a form for the information sharing systems in place at their programs. Let them know that each group will need to select a recorder and someone who will report out on their process.

After participants have had approximately 20 minutes to complete page 1 of the handout, reconvene the large group. Record the responses of each group on chart paper as they report on the following:

- Which system did your group examine?
- What are your recommendations for improving that information sharing system in your programs?
- Who was not being reached through that system and how will those improvements ensure that they receive information?
- Who will need to be involved if these improvements are to take hold?

Then direct participants to page 2 of their handout. Ask them to draw from the ideas presented in the large group discussion to develop a work plan to implement changes in their communication structures.

Debriefing

Note that there is nothing wrong with having overlapping, redundant ways of sharing information. The problem occurs when there are holes in the communication-sharing system — where some parents or staff are not involved in the information-sharing. This activity, which involved evaluating and planning for more effective information-sharing, is something that staff need to engage in periodically to ensure that essential information is shared with all families. This same process can be repeated with parents to gain their input into the communication planning process.

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice

- Establish a communication work group of staff and parents. This committee could discuss and examine communication issues from a variety of perspectives in order to make recommendations for improving communication within the program. The work group could use Handouts 15, 16, or 17 as a way to open discussion.

- Think about a persistent "hurdle" or concern in your program and the underlying communication issues that are a part of it. Seek out views from several different sources – staff, parents, and professionals in the community. Look to see the values behind the differing viewpoints. Plan how to address the concern more effectively the next time it comes up.

Handout 14: Communication Environment

Instructions: Select an area (physical space) in the Head Start program. Under "Message Senders," list any objects and/or people in that area that send messages to parents. Approach one or more parents who are in that area and ask them if they would be willing to answer a few questions for a training exercise that you are doing. Then ask them the questions below. After the conversation, record notes on what they said in the space under "Parent Reactions."

- When you are here (in this area), what do you notice first?
- What "messages" does this area send you?
- How would you describe the atmosphere here?
- Is this an area that you want to spend much time in?

EXAMPLE

Area: Entry Hall

Message Senders: Wall Posters, Receptionist, Chairs

Parent Reactions: I like how some posters are at eye-level for children. Receptionist is so friendly. Chairs are not comfortable, I never see anyone sitting in them.

Area:

Message Senders:

Parent Reactions:

Area:

Message Senders:

Parent Reactions:

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Handout 15: Communication Styles

Introduction: Circle the 6 to 8 statements that describe you best. Then answer the questions on the next page.

I understand well most things that I read	Reading is relaxing	I enjoy keeping a daily journal, calendar or planner	I leave notes for other family members
I look at a newspaper or book every day	I'd rather read the book than watch the movie	I recopy information that I want to remember or understand better	I take a lot of notes at meetings
I like to spend free time reading	To learn how to do something, I like to read the instructions	I prefer to write down my ideas before I say them	I keep in touch with people by writing notes and letters
Hearing other people discuss things helps me form my ideas	I keep the radio or TV on for company	I prefer to read out loud rather than silently	I learn well by discussing my ideas with others
I like to close my eyes and really take in the sounds around me	I remember almost everything I hear	I like to tell stories	I love to spend time on the telephone
I like to listen to stories about people and their lives	To learn how to do something, I like to watch and listen to someone demonstrate it	I like to take part in conversations	I like to ask questions, to understand better

Handout 15: Communication Styles (continued)

Draw a line across the page connecting the two stars. Next draw a line from the top to the bottom of the page connecting two stars. Each quadrant represents one mode of communication. The quadrant in which you have the most items circled may be your preferred communication style:

It is important to note that **no communication style is better than another**. All four styles are useful and important for effective communication.

1. According to this exercise, what is your preferred communication style?

2. Does this make sense to you? why or why not?

3. Give an example of how you have used your preferred communication style in your work at Head Start.

4. According to this exercise, what is your partner's preferred communication style?

5. What does this information suggest for future communications between you and your partner?

6. What does this information suggest for future communications between you and Head Start parents?

Handout 16: Creating A Climate for Communications

Part 1: Think about five ways that your program promotes positive staff-parent communication. To get you started, we have listed an example.

Example: We always make sure the lights are on, the heat or fans are on, and the curtains are opened in all the rooms before any families arrive, so that the place is bright and welcoming.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Part 2: List three ideas for new ways your program could promote effective communications (you may include in this list any activities that your program is currently attempting to do).

Example: Our program could create a place where parents can "hang out" and get to know each other and staff on a more informal basis.

1.

2.

3.

Handout 16: Creating A Climate for Communications (continued)

Part 3: Select one item from Part 2 and develop some options for implementing the plan.

Example: Option 1. We could look at our spacing plan to find a room that we could turn into a lounge. Option 2. If we can't find space, perhaps we can sponsor some community events that encourage informal, social gatherings for parents and staff. Option 3. We can create a bulletin board that lets parents and staff post news and notes directed at each other.

New Idea (from Part 2):

Option 1.

Option 2.

Option 3.

Part 4: List here the points that need to be considered in order to make a decision among these different options.

Handout 17: Systems for Sharing

1. List your formal systems for sharing information, for example: logs, phone trees, newsletters, etc.

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

2. Select from your list one system that you want to examine more closely. Circle it above, then answer the following questions:

   a. Why do we use this system?

   b. Who does it reach?

   c. Who doesn't it reach?

   d. Is there another system that reaches the people who aren't being reached by this one?

   e. How might this system be changed?

3. Summarize your recommendations by answering the following: How would you improve this system or an alternative to this system?

Handout 17: Systems for Sharing (continued)

Work Plan: Use the ideas from both your small group and others in this workshop to develop a plan for implementing changes in your program's communication systems.

1. What system will be changed? _____

2. How will it be changed? _____

3. Who will need to be involved in making these changes?

Staff	**Parents** (or representative group, i.e., working parents)	**Others** (from the community who can help)

4. Outline three steps to take to begin to implement changes in this communication system.

Step 1 _____

Step 2 _____

Step 3 _____

5. How will you know that this change has been successfully implemented? (i.e., what will you look for?)

Continuing Professional Development

Communicating effectively with parents requires continued personal and professional growth and a broad-based knowledge of the program and community. Below are some approaches to expand and build upon the communication skills developed in this guide:

- Meet with a local mental health agency to find out about effective communication approaches for parents and staff who are experiencing stress or other difficulties.

- Form a committee of staff and parents to review and recommend key program materials for revision.

- Community colleges and universities (through their continuing education programs) offer course work in effective communication practices such as:

  • Interpersonal Communication: Includes approaches such as empathic listening, boundary setting, and other skills of effective person-to-person communication.

  • Public Speaking: Covers topics such as developing credibility with an audience, speech delivery, and building personal confidence.

  • Practical Writing Skills: Provides an overview of grammar and sentence structure as well as planning messages for particular audiences.

- Business trainers offer a number of one-day courses to improve and maintain effective communication skills. These can be taken for Professional Continuing Education credit through local, state and national licensing boards. A few such organizations are:

  • Skill Path Seminars. *Assertive Communication Skills.* (1-800-875-7545).

  • National Seminars Group. *How to Communicate with Confidence and Clarity.* (1-800-258-7246).

Materials

Channing L. Bete Co., Inc. ***How to Improve Your Listening Skills*** **(1995).** Channing L. Bete, Co. Inc. 200 State Road, South Deerfied, MA 03173-0200. 16 pgs., $1.00 (if you are ordering more than 100, the cost is $.55 each and the covers can be personalized). This easy-to-read booklet impresses upon readers the effectiveness of good listening skills and their link to stronger relationships and the prevention of costly mistakes. It explains how to overcome barriers and use eyes and ears to "tune" into the speaker's messages.

Dean, Christiann. ***Parent-Caregiver Partnerships: Communication Workshops for Parents and Child Care Providers*** **(1992).** Cornell University Media Services, Resource Center, #7 Business and Technical Park, Ithaca, NY 14850. Telephone (607) 255-2080. 131 pages, $25.50. Developed for the Cornell University Parent-Caregiver Partnership, this publication lays out five, two-hour workshops designed to enhance communication between the child-care provider and the parent. The workshops titles are: Partnerships Between Parents and Caregivers, Listening Well, Saying What You Mean Clearly and Respectfully, Resolving Conflicts and Handling Blame and Criticism, and Panel Discussion and Work Session.

ERIC. ***Communicating with Culturally Diverse Parents of Exceptional Children*** **(1991).** ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22901-1589. Telephone 1-800-328-0272. 2 pages, $1. This ERIC Digest explains the need to be culturally aware when dealing with parents of exceptional children. It discusses using language parents can understand, cultural sensitivity, and the need to provide parents with information. It also stresses the need to support parents as they are learning to participate in the system and to encourage parental participation at home.

PLAN, Inc. ***Just Say It! How to Write for Readers Who Don't Write Well (1992).*** PLAN, Inc., 1528 Pennsylvania Ave., S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003. (202) 547-8903. 132 pages, $54. This manual describes the tools and techniques for creating easy-to-read print materials. It includes practice exercises and an annotated bibliography.

Resources

Robbins, Harvey A. *How to Speak and Listen Effectively* (1992). American Management Association, 135 W. 50th St., New York, NY 10020. 80 pgs., $10.95. This book is based upon the premise that individual and team success is influenced by quality relationships and quality communication. *How to Speak* uses a down-to-earth approach to the process of communication, as explained in its four chapters: "Why Don't People Communicate Better?", "Eliminate the Negatives," "Accentuate the Positives," and "Practice Makes Communication Easier." The book will be useful for anyone involved in communication, including parents, educators, and administrators.

Scholastic, Inc. *Parent Communication TIPS* (1992). Early Childhood Division, 730 Broadway, New York, NY. 64 pages, $9.95. This eclectic accumulation of sixty, one-page tips gives readers a jump start to involvement in their children's development and education. All tips are reproducible send-homes. *Parent Communication TIPS* is split into four sections: "Learning through Play," "Health and Safety," "Cooking and Nutrition," and "Special Situations." The publication provides references to other organizations.

Slack, Jennifer. "Teaching Tips for Learning Centers: Welcoming Parents into the Classroom." *NHSA Journal*, Summer 1993, Vol. 12, No. 1, pages 47-50. This article offers insights for Head Start teachers on involving parents as observers and volunteers in the classroom. It includes ideas on communication that enable staff and parents to keep in touch.

Resource Organization

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). 10801 Rockville Pike, Rockville, MD 20852. Consumer Help Line 1-800-638-8255. This organization has a wealth of information on delays and disabilities in language, speech, and hearing. It has print and video resources and also makes referrals to care providers as well as to community and state resources.

* U.S. G.P.O.:1996-715-032:53014

ISBN 0-16-042687-1